



Youth Work in Diverse Societies

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YouthWorkAndYou.org

**Ulster University, Northern
Ireland**

in collaboration with

**HUMAK University of
Applied Sciences, Finland**

Unit 1

Youth Work in Diverse Societies

Introduction

YouthWorkAndYou.org is brought to you by the Youth Work eLearning Partnership [YWeLP], an Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership 2017-2019.

Introduction

Youth Work in Diverse Societies

Thus unit has been developed by a team from the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences at Ulster University in Northern Ireland.

In this unit we provide a digital platform which shares our experiences of Community Youth Work in a diverse society.

Our experiences in Youth Work, Sociology and the wider social sciences in Northern Ireland have been shaped in a society where questions around cultural identity and "difference" can be highly charged. This is a theme relevant in many places globally.

Before proceeding please watch the Unit 1 video

Setting the Scene

A key question for a unit like this is how do we define the term 'diversity'?

We can think of diversity as the vast range of human difference. It includes such themes as race, age, social class, ethnicity, gender and identity, physical ability and attributes, nationality and ethnicity, religious and ethical beliefs, political values and sexual orientation.

If this is the case, then all societies are diverse societies and this diversity is a theme for youth workers to consider in practice (Friel and McDermott, 2018).

As you will have seen in the video, our own experiences in Northern Ireland, where we work and live, reveal it is a diverse place, with people who express different faiths or no faiths, cultural identities, nationalities, sexuality, gender or social status.



We also need to be aware that in some instances such differences can lead to differing "world views" or outlooks on life. In Northern Ireland, religious and national differences between those who consider themselves to be British/Protestant or Irish/Catholic have caused friction, antagonism and indeed led to an intense conflict. Thankfully, the worst years of that conflict have passed and in more recent years we have seen a wider recognition of identity beyond merely region or national identity. Maybe clashes around national identity and/or ethnicity impact on young people in your own region?

However, in Northern Ireland, even though national identity still plays a key role, other issues of diversity have come to the fore during the region's move towards peace. We have witnessed increased levels of immigration which has brought new identities. There is an emerging confidence for young people to express their identities in ways other than nationality or religion.

There is more visibility of issues relating to diverse themes, such as sexuality, disability, gender and questions around ethnicity have been reframed to include the experiences of previously "hidden" populations, such as migrants and the indigenous nomadic Irish Traveller population. Drawing on our experiences, this unit considers questions around diversity and how they relate to all societies and are important points of reflection for youth work practice.

What you will learn

This unit will help you to critically consider knowledge about the diversities that exist in society and how these are debated, understood, and recognized in different contexts.

It will initiate your thinking on the purpose of Community Youth Work practice in a diverse society.

Examine self-awareness, personal and professional attitudes and values in relation to anti oppressive youth work practice.

Unit 1 Contents



1. Enhanced knowledge about the diversities that exist in society.

The unit will provide an understanding of how these are debated, understood, and recognized in different contexts. We specifically reflect on the experiences of our youth work partners in Northern Ireland but also situate these debates in the context of the challenges faced by youth workers in diverse societies globally.

2. Initiate thinking on the purpose of Community Youth Work practice in a diverse society.

This unit will initiate thinking on how Community Youth Work in your own region engages with questions on diversity. In particular, you will explore and critique concepts like multiculturalism which have frequently been drawn upon in debates on diversity.

3. Self-awareness, personal and professional attitudes and values in relation to anti-oppressive youth work

This unit will enhance self-awareness of your own personal values in tackling inequalities. In addition, you will reflect on the professional attitudes and values which might be required to tackle unequal treatment of minorities in your own region.

You will gather a wider understanding of personal and professional attitudes and values in relation to anti oppressive youth work.

Questions

What is a Diverse Society?

What is the role of Community Youth Work in a Diverse Society?

To answer these questions we will reflect on knowledge, policy and theory about the practice of youth work in Diverse Societies.

Engaging with Interactive Video Content

1. Diversity and Community Youth Work

Community Youth workers as educators are often in the position of working with the most vulnerable and excluded young people, groups and communities. Driving principles underpinning practice include those of social justice and democratic participation. Therefore a social and educational vision of justice and equality is required as grounding for practice. Working towards the greater inclusion of young people and their communities necessitates those entering the profession critically engage with the concepts of equality and diversity. Working with diversity requires the recognition of individual and group difference and the impact of difference on identity, territory and culture. Equality is about creating a fairer society, where everyone can participate and have opportunity to fulfil their potential. This requires identification of patterns of experience, understanding multi-complex social, economic and political contexts and challenging processes that limit life chances (Walsh, 2017).


This unit examines how youth workers in their practice can deal with diversity through a focus on the themes of equity, diversity and interdependence and the equality and human rights legislative framework which

informs the above. The major focus will be on the differences and inequalities associated with gender, cross-community, race, social class, ability and sexual orientation. Students will critically examine the dynamics which can shape professional practice in a diverse society and the personal, cultural and structural barriers that undermine the conditions under which true participation can take place and develop strategies towards anti-oppressive and transformative practice.



2. Ethnicity, Nation and Diversity

Often questions around diversity have been debated within the framework of what has come to be termed as 'multiculturalism'. Multiculturalism is a contested concept because some critics think it merely identifies differences between communities and cements barriers or boundaries between groups. Modood (2011) disputes this and notes that at the core of a true multicultural ethos should be dialogue between these different groups.



Multiculturalism as a concept emerged as a result of increased immigration in the 20th century and, similar to Modood's sentiments, some prefer the concept of "interculturalism" to emphasise engagement between peoples, as opposed to the maintenance of separate boundaries (UNESCO, 2007).

However, multiculturalism as a concept can be considered to have raised the profile of diversity questions globally, even though it means different things to different people (Kymlicka, 2007; Modood, 2011).

Therefore, questions of diversity have often been understood as synonymous with multiculturalism. Indeed, the diversity brought about by immigration is amongst the most challenging in many places – perhaps including your own location? The question of immigration is probably one of the most difficult issues in any contemporary society and seeps into the environment in which youth workers internationally conduct their practice.

However, multiculturalism can also be considered as more complex and does not relate to only immigrant minorities. Many regions also contain minority groups who have been in the region for many years (centuries even) and whose views conflict with those of the majority

(Ratcliffe, 2004). Often such groups are also subject to discrimination and marginalisation and their culture and identity goes largely unrecognised in the public space. This often results in wider social marginalisation and other problems.

Examples of such groups might include the nomadic Irish Traveller population in Ireland, the Sámi population in the Nordic regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Australia. In all of the groups just mentioned, higher levels of poverty, illiteracy, illness and early death are evident.

This raises questions for youth workers because they may be tasked with engaging young people from the majority population with those from a minority group. The foundations of youth work practice are about participation and inclusion for all young people, regardless of their background. Nonetheless, this also involves respecting difference and cultural backgrounds whilst instilling value, sense of belonging and inclusion for all. These sit comfortably with some of the objectives of multiculturalism as a general ethos, which values the individual sense of belonging whilst upholding the right to cultural difference (Kymlicka, 1995)

3. Social Groups and Diversity

Understanding diversity in society means reflecting on the multi-complex, socio-political context in which youth work practices. As stated above, this unit aims to develop an appreciation in the reader, of how the lived experiences of young people, their culture and territory are shaped and impacted by the diverse society in which they live.

What does this mean In youth work practice? It is important to consider your practice and the diverse themes in your geographic or thematic area; e.g. disability, gender, race and ethnicity or the experiences of LGBTQI youth.

As you reflect, explore some critical questions, e.g. How is diversity defined? How is participation promoted in practice? How inclusive is youth work in the organisation, and in my own practice?

Diversity in practice must also consider the policy and legislative framework that underpins provision and governance associated with human rights, equality, participation and inclusion in a diverse society.



4. Diversity In Focus: Key Challenges for Youth Work in Diverse Societies

Sectarianism continues to be a key challenge for practice in Northern Ireland because sensitivities around the conflict remain. In other societies it may also be the case that different communities may have experienced difficult pasts which continue to influence levels of mistrust. This may be due to conflict, periods of political upheaval, or where groups were treated differently because of identity or other factors, such as disability, gender or sexuality. Indeed, maintaining a focus on diversity is a key challenge for youth work. This involves considering and working to challenge the attitudes, values, political, cultural and societal norms and behaviours which impact negatively on the experiences of groups and individuals.

For young people in such contested spaces these problems, behaviours, attitudes and values might occur from generation to generation.

Think, then, what impact or role should Youth Work have in such circumstances? Therefore, a wider recognition of human and cultural rights, acknowledging and negotiating these issues are more and more considered as critical questions for youth workers.

This part of the unit asks you to consider what knowledge, theory and understanding you need to practice as a youth worker in such a diverse society.

Links to other Information and Reading

Here is a list of additional information which will assist you to explore questions around diverse societies and community youth work practice. The resources here will help you further understand this topic and apply to your own work.

Journal Articles, Books and Reports

Bullock, S. Brestovanský, M. and Lenco, P. (2015). *Inclusion, Diversity and Equality in Youth Work: The Principles and Approaches*. Cheltenham: University of Gloucestershire. eprints.glos.ac.uk/4286/1/01_Bullock%20Brestovansky%20Lenco_2016_Inclusion%20Diversity%20and%20Equality-The%20Principles%20and%20Approaches_FINALAL0.pdf

Friel, B. and McDermott, P. (2018). *Shared Stories, Safe Spaces*. Derry-Londonderry, North West Migrants Forum. https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/76415442/Shared_Stories_Report_A4_v2.pdf

Harland, K, & Morgan, S. (2003). "Youth Work with Young Men in Northern Ireland: An 'Advocacy' Approach". *Youth & Policy* 82 p74-85

Kymlicka, W. (2007) *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the International Politics of Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mac an Ghaill, M. and Haywood, C. (2007). *Gender, Culture and Identity: contemporary femininities and masculinities*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

Modood, T. (2011) *Multiculturalism and Integration: Struggling with Confusions*. European University Institute. <https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/mars/source/resources/references/others/38%20-%20Multiculturalisme%20and%20Integration%20-%20Modood%202011.pdf>

Peltola, M. (2009) *Youth Work in Finland – Finding Ways for Intercultural Opening*. Helsinki: Finnish Youth Research Society. <http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/images/julkaisuja/youthwork.pdf>

Ratcliffe, P (2004). *Race Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2009) *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*. New York: UNESCO. https://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing_in_cultural_diversity.pdf

Walsh, A (2017) *Make Minority a Priority: Insights from Minority Ethnic Young People Growing Up in Ireland and Recommendations for the Youth Sector*. Dublin: National Youth Council of Ireland. <https://www.youth.ie/documents/makeminorityapriority-complete-research-final-0/>

Websites

Centre for Multicultural Youth: Good Practice Guide

https://www.cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/Culturally%20Competent%20Youth%20Work2011_0.pdf

Cultural Diversity as a Learning Tool in Youth Work

<http://www.communityactiondacorum.org/cultural-diversity-youth-work/4594052612>

Multicultural Practice in Youth Work

<https://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0103-whittaker.html>

Resources for Intercultural or Inclusive Youth Work

<http://www.intercultural.ie/articles/resources-for-intercultural-or-inclusive-youth-work/>

Wrapping Up

This unit has enhanced knowledge about the diversities that exist in society and how these are debated, understood and recognized in different contexts.

The unit has initiated thinking and enhanced knowledge regarding the purpose of Community Youth Work practice in a range of diversity contexts and themes.

The unit has initiated a process of enhanced self-awareness, personal and professional attitudes and values in relation to anti oppressive youth work practice in diverse societies.

Conclusion

1. Diversity is often considered a "challenge" in society and as such processes and concepts such as 'multiculturalism' and 'interculturalism' have been developed across a whole range of social policies and practice.
2. Often the strengths associated with diversity are hidden and not discussed openly. Youth workers have are in a prime position through which to emphasise the value of diversity and the learning potential of engaging with people who have different views and experiences from our own.
3. These processes of self-awareness are the critical factor in relation to working in a diverse society.

As we have seen all societies are diverse in multiple ways. Concepts like ethnicity, nationality or migration might instantly come to mind when we hear the words 'diversity' or 'multiculturalism'. However, diversity extends to a whole range of other social diversities Including sexuality, gender, disability, class and many other forms of social hierarchy. As youth workers a reflection and understanding of multiple experiences - which in some instances may clash with our own - is crucial to negotiate these multiple world views.

The following units take us further in exploring the practical challenges faced by Youth Workers in Northern Ireland and how the range of responses might further your own understanding of youth work and youth work practice.

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Unit 1

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<https://www.youthworkandyou.org/ywelp-four/>

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